

PROPOSED SAC DEL RIO RELEASE

1. Col. Hubert Zenke, Commanding Officer 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (Light), announced today that his command has been designated to receive the newly procured Lockheed U-2 aircraft. These aircraft will be assigned to the 4026th and the 4029th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (Weather) and will be utilized to support the 3rd Weather Wing of the Air Weather Service by providing meteorological data from high altitudes. The U-2 will also be utilized in the conduct of upper air research which will originate from this base.

2. Laughlin Air Force Base has been chosen, in this instance, as it is considered more suitable for operational training in the U-2 and provides a more central location for research and joint USAF/AEC weather activities to be conducted in the western hemisphere.

3. The newly acquired U-2 aircraft, which are, for the first time, being introduced to Air Force operations, has undergone considerable tests by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. Since 1956, NACA has been conducting an upper atmosphere research program on a world-wide basis, and previously announced that it considers the U-2 to be a capable vehicle for carrying out research of the type currently of interest to the USAF. Data obtained through the program has proven to be extremely valuable in developing methods of forecasting meteorological phenomena which is important to

high altitude flight. The USAF is currently planning to continue this research on a long term basis supplying both NACA and AWS with acquired data.

4. In response to the requirement of the AWS to increase high altitude weather data collection capability, the USAF negotiated with the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation for the procurement of U-2 aircraft on a limited basis. Deliveries began during the latter part of fiscal year 1957.

5. The introduction of the newly designed U-2 aircraft to Air Force operations will not only enable weather support to the primary vehicles of the 4080th but will enable the continuation of the valuable data gathering research program currently being conducted by the NACA.

6. The U-2 aircraft is powered by a Pratt & Whitney J-57 engine, and operates in the subsonic speed range at altitudes up to 55,000 feet. Performance thus far has proven it to be far more economical than tactical type aircraft, despite the need for considerable maintenance due to operational peculiarities. The USAF has monitored the Lockheed development and observers praise of the performance gave rise to USAF interest and the subsequent limited procurement. It is believed that the expanded capability which the USAF can now furnish, through the utilization of the U-2, will allow the AWS to better its service to military operational forces. The current NACA program, as it is now scheduled, is of relatively short duration whereas the USAF program will be of indefinite duration.